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Afghanistan: Status and Prospects for the Resistance

Talking Points for the DCI
19 January 1984

Four years after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the resistance has become an effective force that controls much of the country. The Soviets have become increasingly concerned by the costs and difficulties of containing the resistance. Barring a dramatic change in Soviet policy or a significant reduction in foreign support for the insurgents, we believe the resistance will continue near current levels for the next two to three years. [REDACTED]

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Soviet and Regime Losses

Large-scale Soviet and Afghan operations in 1983 failed to weaken the resistance:

- Soviet and regime forces were unable to inflict a major defeat on the resistance in 1983.
- The Afghan Government failed to increase the area of the country under its control. It remains about 30 percent, or the same as in 1982.
- The Kabul regime controls about two-thirds of the population, less than in 1982.
- The Soviets have failed so far to rebuild the Afghan Army into a force capable of effectively fighting the resistance. [REDACTED]

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Our estimates [REDACTED] indicate that Soviet costs in the war have been much higher than Moscow expected:

- We estimate that more than 17,000 Soviets have been killed or wounded in Afghanistan. The Afghan Army has suffered nearly 50,000 casualties and nearly 80,000 men have deserted.
- The insurgents have shot down or destroyed in airfield attacks some 400 (and perhaps as many as 500) Soviet and

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Afghan aircraft (mostly helicopters), and nearly 150 more have been lost in accidents. Heavy machineguns have been the insurgents' most effective antiaircraft weapon, but they are becoming more proficient with SA-7 heat-seeking missiles.

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-- Approximately 10,000 Soviet and Afghan armored vehicles and trucks have been destroyed or damaged in the war.

-- We estimate that direct Soviet military costs in Afghanistan probably total more than \$14 billion since the invasion.

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Soviet Options

Despite increasing Soviet concern about losses, we judge that Moscow still finds the costs of the war bearable and believe that in the long run it will defeat the resistance. We believe there is no immediate prospect that the Soviets will decide to reduce their military effort in Afghanistan.

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The Soviets have begun a number of economic, educational, social, and political programs in Afghanistan aimed at eventually turning the country into a viable Soviet-dominated communist state. Because of widespread insurgent activity and broad opposition from the Afghan people, however, we believe these programs have been implemented in only a few areas.

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There are some Soviet options--such as a massive reinforcement of the approximately 100,000 Soviet troops now in Afghanistan, major cross-border operations into Pakistan, or a

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widespread scorched earth policy against civilians--that might drastically reduce the insurgency in the next two years:

- Moscow, however, would be reluctant to assume the high political, economic, and military costs associated with these options, in our judgment.
- The denial of Pakistan as an insurgent sanctuary would seriously weaken the resistance. [REDACTED]

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We judge that Moscow will not withdraw Soviet troops from Afghanistan as part of a political settlement if it would appear to result in the collapse of the Soviet-dominated government. The Soviets continue with the UN-sponsored indirect talks on Afghanistan in order to appease world opinion and in hopes of persuading Pakistan to enter direct negotiations with the Kabul regime, a move that would imply recognition. [REDACTED]

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Increasing Insurgent Effectiveness

The Afghan resistance appears more effective now than at any time since the Soviet invasion in 1979:

- Resistance leader Masood--the most prominent if not most effective insurgent commander--has expanded his guerrillas' area of operations to the north and east of the Panjsher Valley, where he continues to observe a tacit cease-fire with the Soviets.
- The resistance has besieged major government garrisons and towns in Paktia Province in eastern Afghanistan since spring. An elite Soviet-trained Afghan brigade was routed in early spring and government units in Khowst are still dependent on air transport for resupply.
- The insurgents have expanded the war with attacks in and around major cities, especially Kabul. Although the government maintains control of Kabul, resistance activity in the city is common, and [REDACTED] the Soviet Army headquarters in Kabul was attacked a number of times
- By the end of the year, insurgent activities threatened government control in other major cities--including Qandahar, Herat, and Mazar-e Sharif.
- The insurgents have also become more effective in disrupting the Afghan economy. There were frequent attacks on the electrical grid last spring and supply

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convoys continue to be regular targets of the insurgents. Resistance checkpoints to collect taxes or to steal goods are also common.

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The resistance has shown improved proficiency with antiaircraft weapons--principally heavy machineguns--mortars and grenade launchers

there is more tactical cooperation between different resistance groups, particularly in the Kabul area.

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Prospects for the Resistance

We judge that the resistance will become more politically sophisticated and militarily effective in the next two years, but will remain vulnerable:

- The most serious threat to the resistance is civilian war-weariness and the loss of popular support that over the long term would directly affect the insurgents' will to continue fighting.
- Tactical cooperation among insurgent bands will continue, but deep ideological, political, and religious differences will prevent resistance unification.
- Continuing--and probably increasing--Soviet and Kabul regime efforts to subvert the resistance by negotiating tactical truces with some insurgent groups, encouraging defections, and infiltrating insurgent bands, could exploit resistance weaknesses.

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We believe that insurgent acquisition of additional antiaircraft weapons--primarily more heavy machineguns as well as heat-seeking missiles--mortars and grenade launchers would strengthen the resistance and increase Soviet losses. More emphasis on urban attacks--particularly against Soviet military targets in Kabul--would increase the pressure on the Soviets and give greater publicity to the continuing resistance, in our view.

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